

# The Longer Discourse on the Cowherd

*Mahā Gopālaka Sutta* (MN)

The Supreme Buddha explains the weaknesses and good qualities of mendicants giving an example about cowherds who maintain and expand a herd of cattle. When a cowherd has eleven factors, he is unskillful in maintaining and expanding a herd of cattle. Likewise, when a mendicant has eleven factors, he is also not successful in achieving growth, improvement, or maturity in the teachings and trainings of Buddha's dispensation. After that the Blessed one points out the good qualities of a mendicant who can achieve growth, improvement, and maturity in this teaching and training. Learning this discourse, the Longer Discourse on the Cowherd, *Mahagopālaka Sutta*, we are able to identify which qualities we develop and what factors we overcome on the path of liberation according to the Buddha.

The Blessed one explained this discourse when he was staying near Sāvattthī in Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's monastery. There the Buddha addressed his disciples (mendicants) "Disciples!"

"Venerable sir," they replied. The Buddha said this:

When a cowherd is with eleven factors, he can't maintain and expand a herd of cattle. What eleven? They are;

When a cowherd

1. doesn't know form of the herd of cattle,
2. is unskilled in characteristics of cows and bulls,
3. doesn't pick out flies' eggs from cows,
4. doesn't dress wounds of cows,
5. doesn't smoke out pests of cows,
6. doesn't know the ford that cows go down,
7. doesn't know satisfaction of cows,
8. doesn't know the trail that cows should go,
9. is not skilled in pastures (grasslands) where cows eat,
10. milks dry,
11. and doesn't show extra respect to the bulls who are fathers and leaders of the herd,

A cowherd with these eleven factors can't maintain and expand a herd of cattle. In the same way, a disciple with eleven factors can't achieve growth, improvement, or maturity in this teaching and training. What eleven? They are;

When a disciple (or mendicant)

1. doesn't know form,
2. is unskilled in characteristics,
3. doesn't pick out flies' eggs,
4. doesn't dress wounds
5. doesn't smoke out pests,
6. doesn't know the ford,

7. doesn't know satisfaction,
8. doesn't know the trail,
9. is not skilled in pastures,
10. milks dry,
11. and doesn't show extra respect to senior mendicants of long standing, long gone forth, fathers and leaders of the Saṅgha.

#### ❖ **Unknowing of Form:**

And how does a disciple of the Buddha not know form? It's when a disciple doesn't truly understand that all form is the four primary elements, and form derived from the four primary elements. That's how a disciple doesn't know form.

#### ❖ **Unskilled in Characteristics:**

And how is a disciple not skilled in characteristics? It's when a disciple doesn't understand that a fool is characterized by their deeds, and an astute person is characterized by their deeds. That's how a mendicant isn't skilled in characteristics.

#### ❖ **Not Picking out Flies' eggs:**

And how does a disciple not pick out flies' eggs? It's when a mendicant tolerates a sensual, malicious, or cruel thought that has arisen. They tolerate any bad, unskillful qualities that have arisen. They don't give them up, get rid of them, eliminate them, and obliterate them. That's how a mendicant doesn't pick out flies' eggs.

#### ❖ **Not Dressing Wounds:**

And how does a disciple not dress wounds? When a mendicant sees a sight with their eyes, they get caught up in the features and details. Since the faculty of sight is left unrestrained, bad unskillful qualities of desire and aversion become overwhelming. They don't practice restraint, they don't protect the faculty of sight, and they don't achieve its restraint. When they hear a sound with their ears ... smell an odor with their nose ... taste a flavor with their tongue ... feel a touch with their body ... know a thought with their mind, they get caught up in the features and details. Since the faculty of the mind is left unrestrained, bad unskillful qualities of desire and aversion become overwhelming. They don't practice restraint, they don't protect the faculty of the mind, and they don't achieve its restraint. That's how a mendicant doesn't dress wounds.

#### ❖ **Not Smoking out Pests (insects or flies):**

And how does a disciple not smoke out pests? It's when a disciple doesn't teach others the Dhamma in detail as they learned and memorized it. That's how a disciple doesn't smoke out pests.

#### ❖ **Not Knowing the Ford:**

And how does a disciple not know the ford? It's when a mendicant doesn't from time to time go up to those mendicants who are very learned—knowledgeable in the scriptures, who have memorized the teachings, the texts on monastic training, and the outlines—and ask them questions: 'Why, sir, does it say

this? What does that mean?' Those venerables don't clarify what is unclear, reveal what is obscure, and dispel doubt regarding the many doubtful matters. That's how a mendicant doesn't know the ford.

❖ **Not Knowing Satisfaction:**

And how does a disciple not know satisfaction? It's when a disciple, when the teaching and training proclaimed by the Realized One are being taught, finds no joy in the meaning and the teaching, and finds no joy connected with the teaching. That's how a mendicant doesn't know satisfaction.

❖ **Not Knowing the Trail:**

And how does a mendicant not know the trail? It's when a disciple doesn't truly understand the noble eightfold path. That's how a disciple doesn't know the trail.

❖ **Not Skilled in Pastures (grasslands)**

And how is a disciple not skilled in pastures? It's when a mendicant doesn't truly understand the four kinds of mindfulness meditation. That's how a mendicant is not skilled in pastures.

❖ **Milking Dry:**

And how does a disciple milk dry? It's when a mendicant is invited by a householder to accept robes, alms-food, lodgings, and medicines and supplies for the sick, and that mendicant doesn't know moderation in accepting. That's how a mendicant milk dry.

❖ **Not Showing Extra Respect to Senior Mendicants:**

And how does a disciple not show extra respect to senior mendicants of long standing, long gone forth, fathers and leaders of the Saṅgha? It's when a mendicant doesn't consistently treat senior mendicants of long standing, long gone forth, fathers and leaders of the Saṅgha with kindness by way of body, speech, and mind, both in public and in private. That's how a disciple doesn't show extra respect to senior mendicants of long standing, long gone forth, fathers and leaders of the Saṅgha.

If a mendicant with these eleven qualities, he is unable to achieve growth, improvement, or maturity in the teaching and training of Buddhism.

A cowherd with eleven qualities can maintain and expand a herd of cattle. What eleven? They are;

1. When a cowherd knows form,
2. is skilled in characteristics,
3. picks out flies' eggs,
4. dresses wounds,
5. smokes out pests,
6. knows the ford,
7. knows satisfaction,
8. knows the trail,
9. is skilled in pastures (grasslands),
10. doesn't milk dry,
11. and shows extra respect to the bulls who are fathers and leaders of the herd.

A cowherd with these eleven factors can maintain and expand a herd of cattle.

In the same way, a learned disciple with eleven qualities can achieve growth, improvement, and maturity in this teaching and training. What eleven? It's when a disciple knows form, is skilled in characteristics, picks out flies' eggs, dresses wounds, smokes out pests, knows the ford, knows satisfaction, knows the trail, is skilled in pastures, doesn't milk dry, and shows extra respect to senior mendicants of long standing, long gone forth, fathers and leaders of the Saṅgha.

❖ Understanding four fundamental elements and forms derived from the four fundamental elements.

And how does a learned disciple know form? It's when a mendicant truly understands that all form is the four fundamental elements, and form derived from the four primary elements.

**Four Fundamental Elements:**

1. Earth (*patavi*)
2. Water (*āpo*)
3. Heat (*tejo*)
4. Air (*vāyo*)

**Derived Forms which depend on the Four Primary Elements:**

Physical sense organs:	5. Seeing ( <i>cakkhu</i> )
	6. Hearing ( <i>sota</i> )
	7. Smelling ( <i>ghāna</i> )
	8. Tasting ( <i>jivhā</i> )
	9. Body ( <i>kāya</i> )
Physical sense objects:	10. (visual) Form ( <i>rupa</i> )
	11. Sound ( <i>sadda</i> )
	12. Odor ( <i>gandha</i> )
	13. Taste ( <i>rasa</i> ), (bodily impacts)
	14. Femininity ( <i>itthi bhāva</i> )
	15. Virility ( <i>purisa bhāva</i> )
	16. Physical base of mind ( <i>hadayavatthu</i> )
	17. Bodily impression ( <i>kaya viññatti</i> )
	18. Verbal impression ( <i>citta viññatti</i> )
	19. Physical life ( <i>rupa jivitindriya</i> )
	20. Space element ( <i>ākasa dhātu</i> )
	21. Physical Agility ( <i>rupassa luhutā</i> )
	22. Physical elasticity ( <i>rupassa mudutā</i> )
	23. Physical adaptability ( <i>rupassa kammaññatā</i> )
	24. Physical Growth ( <i>rupassa upacaya</i> )
	25. Physical continuity ( <i>rupassa santati</i> )
	26. Decay ( <i>jaratā</i> )
	27. Impermanence ( <i>aniccata</i> )
	28. Nutriment ( <i>āhāra</i> )

When these forms relate to living physical body, these things arise and cease together at the moment according to conditions.

❖ **Understanding a fool or an astute person is characterized by their actions.**

And how is a disciple skilled in characteristics? It's when a disciple understands that a fool is characterized by their deeds, and an astute person is characterized by their deeds. That's how a disciple is skilled in characteristics.

❖ **Not Accepting Sensual, Malicious or Cruel thoughts**

And how does a disciple pick out flies' eggs? It's when a disciple doesn't tolerate a sensual, malicious, or cruel thought that has arisen. They don't tolerate any bad, unskillful qualities that have arisen, but give them up, get rid of them, eliminate them, and obliterate them. That's how a mendicant pick out flies' eggs.

❖ **Not getting caught up in the features and details about objects with their senses like eye, hear**

And how does a disciple dress wound? When a disciple sees a sight with their eyes, they don't get caught up in the features and details. If the faculty of sight were left unrestrained, bad unskillful qualities of desire and aversion would become overwhelming. For this reason, they practice restraint, protecting the faculty of sight, and achieving its restraint. When they hear a sound with their ears ... smell an odor with their nose ... taste a flavor with their tongue... feel a touch with their body ... know a thought with their mind, they don't get caught up in the features and details. If the faculty of mind were left unrestrained, bad unskillful qualities of desire and aversion would become overwhelming. For this reason, they practice restraint, protecting the faculty of mind, and achieving its restraint. That's how a disciple dress wound.

❖ **Teaching the Dhamma in detail as someone learned, memorized and practiced it to others**

And how does a disciple smoke out pests? It's when a disciple teaches others the Dhamma in detail as they learned and memorized it. That's how a disciple smoke out pests. While someone is practicing the dhamma, if he explains it to others too, that teaching helps him to go forward fast. That is why Buddhism points out preaching dhamma is one of the entrances of liberation (*vimutthāyatana*). Also, helping someone with Dhamma is the highest gift. The gift of Dhamma excels all other gifts (*Sabba dānam dhammadānam jināti*).

❖ **Going up to other mendicants who are well learned and practiced the Dhamma**

And how does a disciple know the ford? It's when from time to time a disciple goes up to those mendicants who are very learned-knowledgeable in the scriptures, who have memorized the teachings, the texts on monastic training, and the outlines—and asks them questions: 'Why, sir, does it say this? What does that mean?' Those venerables clarify what is unclear, reveal what is obscure, and dispel doubt regarding the many doubtful matters. That's how a disciple knows the ford.

## ❖ **Knowing Satisfaction What about He Learned and Practiced**

And how does a disciple know satisfaction? It's when a disciple, when the teaching and training proclaimed by the Realized One are being taught, finds joy in the meaning and the teaching, and finds joy connected with the teaching. That's how a disciple knows satisfaction.

## ❖ **Understanding the Noble Eightfold Path**

And how does a disciple know the trail? It's when a mendicant truly understands the noble eightfold path which a disciple should practice to achieve liberation. That's how a mendicant knows the trail.

The Noble Eightfold Paths – Right Understanding	( <i>Sammā ditthi</i> )
Right Thoughts	( <i>Sammā samkappa</i> )
Right Speech	( <i>Sammā vācā</i> )
Right Action	( <i>Sammā kammantha</i> )
Right Livelihood	( <i>Sammā ājiva</i> )
Right Effort	( <i>Sammā vāyāma</i> )
Right Mindfulness	( <i>Sammā sathi</i> )
Right Concentration	( <i>Sammā samādhi</i> )

Before practicing this deliverance path, it is very important to know the dependent origination which consists in right understanding.

## ❖ **Understanding the Fourfold Mindfulness**

And how is a disciple skilled in pastures? It's when a mendicant truly understands the four kinds of mindfulness meditation. That's how a disciple is skilled in pastures.

The Fourfold Mindfulness -

1. The contemplation of matter or body (*Kāyanupassanā*)
2. The contemplation of feelings (*Vedanānupassanā*)
3. The contemplation of mind or consciousness (*Cittānupassanā*)
4. The contemplation of mental formations (*Dhammānupassanā*)

## ❖ **Knowing the Moderation in Accepting**

And how does a disciple not milk dry? It's when a mendicant is invited by a householder to accept robes, alms-food, lodgings, and medicines and supplies for the sick, and that mendicant knows moderation in accepting. That's how a mendicant doesn't milk dry.

## ❖ **Treating Senior Mendicants of Long Standing and Long Gone Forth**

And how does a disciple show extra respect to senior mendicants of long standing, long gone forth, fathers and leaders of the Saṅgha? It's when a disciple consistently treats senior mendicants of long standing, long gone forth, fathers and leaders of the Saṅgha with kindness by way of body, speech, and

mind, both in public and in private. That's how a disciple shows extra respect to senior mendicants of long standing, long gone forth, fathers and leaders of the Saṅgha.

Following above eleven qualities a disciple can achieve growth, improvement, and maturity in this teaching and training in what the Supreme Buddha preached.

When the Supreme Buddha explained the discourse, the disciples were satisfied and happy with what the Buddha preached. In this discourse, several main doctrines in Buddhism have been discussed like, associating good friends, the fourfold mindfulness, the noble eightfold path, the group of corporeality, the discipline in senses etc. Paying good attention to these topics help us to go forward on the path of liberation. Using these doctrines let's try to reduce defilements in our minds and achieve the everlasting happiness, Nibbana. For that we have to make an unshakable mind practicing mindfulness.

Dwell with yourselves as an island, with yourselves as a refuge, with no other refuge;  
dwell with the Dhamma as an island, with the Dhamma as a refuge, with no other refuge.

***Atta dīpā bhikkhave viharatha atta saranā na añña saranā,  
Dhamma dīpā bhikkhave viharatha dhamma saranā na añña saranā.***



May the Triple Gem Bless You!

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May All Beings be Well, Happy and Peaceful!

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